



## MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

**Meeting Date:** October 22, 2020

**Agenda Item:** Box Elder Creek Conservation Easement, Region 6

**Action Needed:** Endorsement

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

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**Background:** The Box Elder Creek Ranch is located approximately 18 miles southeast of Chinook in Blaine County. It consists of about 8,120 contiguous acres (7,000 acres deeded and 1,120 acres of School Trust Land). Approximately 6000+ acres are native habitats, primarily mixed grass prairie, shrub-grassland, wetland, and riparian habitats. There are riparian floodplains and brushy draws associated with the 13 miles of Box Elder Creek and its tributaries that traverse the ranch. A portion of the ranch includes glaciated plains with shallow depressional wetlands in an area identified as important waterfowl habitat and also supports mule and white-tailed deer, pronghorn, sharp-tailed grouse, and pheasants. These grasslands provide breeding habitat for five grassland bird species of greatest conservation need.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** FWP has not sought public comment at this time. Upon endorsement from the commission, the department would proceed with negotiations and conduct appropriate analysis and public review process.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** The property provides a high-quality mix of native wildlife habitats and associated game bird and big game hunting opportunities. The conservation easement option allows the ranch to remain in private management and ownership while conserving (and in some cases increasing) the productivity and ecological and recreational values of the property. This property is located in an area where the threat of conversion of native range to tilled cropland has been increasing. In the absence of this project, the threat of conversion of this large block of native prairie, with associated wetland and riparian habitats, is significant.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** FWP recommends proceeding with this conservation project because of the potential threats and habitat conservation values associated with the property.

**Proposed Motion:** I move that the commission endorse the proposed Box Elder Creek Conservation Easement, allowing the department to initiate negotiations and conduct analysis and associated public review.